

24/considerable justification, that even if he raised larger and more diversified crops, they would not find a ready sale (due to undeveloped lines of transport to world markets). Thus the old pattern of not raising more crops than one's family can consume in one year, and for taxes and tribute, continues, especially among the Amhara; consequently fields do not become exhausted as quickly as they would in intensive agriculture.

● [427] Another factor was (and is to some extent) the insecurity of tenure. The sharecropping "gabbar" was little more than a serf, who did not know from year to year what treatment he would receive from the next (often absentee) feudal landlord to whom his land might be assigned the next year. This was not conducive to the growth of much sentimental attachment to any particular plot of soil.

[317] Among the Amhara, only about 20% of the potentially fertile area available in a neighborhood ("and debber agär") is usually under cultivation in any one year. On exposed parts of the plateau the crops are usually barley, broad beans, some bearded wheat, and linseed. In more sheltered spots; lentils, chick peas, and a legume called "gwayo" used as cattle fodder (but feared by Amhara because walking in it or lying in it is supposed to cause softening of the human bones). Barley is planted almost the whole year round, starting early with the "light rains", and irrigated in the dry season. In valleys of the plateau, where fields are warmer and more protected, as well as better watered, the major crop of tieff, a grass-like

243 crops, and the only one grown all year, thus the most often irrigated. It grows well even on semi-eroded soil, unlike wheat. It is consumed in emergencies, and more usually used in making beer, despite its comparatively poor malting qualities. It is provided as fodder for the mule, the most important animal for human transportation, to give it "strength". Barley becomes more important for human consumption when the rainy season has been shorter than usual. In that case, the grain is soaked in water and then crushed with wooden mortar and pestle to remove the husks without reducing the grain to flour. After drying in the sun, the broken grain called "gebs qolo" is roasted and eaten. Some is always in the hut, in case guests should come. The same crushing procedure is followed for preparing malt for barley beer. Late, irrigated barley called "aja", is considered tough but "giving strength", though dishonorable for a guest, and also causing complaint from women that it is "hard to pound" and "good only for mules".

Oats and rice as special crops are almost unknown to the Amhara. Oats ("gēncha", "arāmamo", "qwa"), considered wild, are gathered with barley and used in beer.

In view of the importance of cereal crops, it is not surprising that the farmer refers to them collectively as "teru", which means "good", while garden crops ("debāla") which enjoy a lesser appreciation, are not included in this concept.

• 427
8047 Rent, tribute and taxes were paid per "madiga", the clay water pot used to measure it. Although this procedure is no longer followed, rent is still quoted in terms of "madiga".

423 If these interludes of peace lengthened greatly,
 566 the feudal knight ("färäsēnya") would often conclude a
 701 contract with his "gultēñña", which gave both parties
 some security in what they could expect of each other in
 services and privileges. This contract usually took the
 [42] form of "siso" (lit. one-third). The "gultēñña" thus
 became a sharecropper, paying 1/3 of his produce to the
 feudal lord after each harvest, working statute-labor
 for him one day in three, making his team of oxen avail-
 able on a basis of one day in three. Sometimes the "gul-
 tēñña" thus became a sharecropper and little better off
 than the "gabbar", especially if no war service inter-
 rupted the arrangement for many years. Though he could
 pass on much of the labor to his own gabbars, he himself
 sometimes became so debt-ridden to the feudal landlord
 above him that his status resembled that of a Mexican
 peon. "Siso" contracts were rare in Shoa, where the
 "gultēñña" was frequently called to war, and his status
 as honorable and free soldier-veteran thus never faded
 away.

The fortunes of war ruled the life of the "gultēñña"
 much more than the owner of "rest" property. For if the
 Ras (feudal top nobility) of his province, under whom
 the gultēñña was fighting, lost in a war or in a rebellion,
 the gultēñña found himself under a newly-appointed Ras
 who might ignore customary relaxation of burdens, who
 might even confiscate the "gult" lands and make the home-
 steads "gabbar" serfs, leaving them only the alternative
 of escaping into the bush. Outside of Shoa, (where fertile
 land is more expensive and more closely guarded), the

423 The richest farmer in the rural vicinity of Gondar,
427 a member of the Qemant (Cushitic-speaking) ethnic group,
owns 8 gasha (about 400 acres), which is considered
fabulous wealth by his Amhara neighbors. However, with
the aid of his sons and servants, he cultivates only
one gasha at any given time. He parcels out the re-
maining 7 gasha, except for some fallow land, to land-
less tenant farmers, many of them ex-slaves, usually
in plots no bigger than 10 qada (about 4 acres), which
is considered the limit one man can plow and seed with-
out help. The rent they pay him consists of one "madi-
ga" of tyeff grain (about 25 kilo); payable by each.
Each also pays him 1/2 madiga of barley, referred to
as "qolo", tribute to his "household". His agents
also collect the 10% tithe, in produce, which he is
expected to pass on to the government, and the new
Ethiopian education tax. He invests part of his profits
in cows for his increasing herds.

423 For purposes of taxation, of peasants, the govern-
651 ment treasury must rely on the judgment of the headman,
("cheqa shum"), who is difficult to check because the
land is unmeasured and a "gasha" is a flexible concept.
Therefore, his supervisor, usually the mislane, can
only base a check on past, customary payments.

[651] Taxcollectors are known to be generous when deal-
423 ing with even distant kinfolk, or with priests and
651 their relatives, and to even out the receipts by pres-
653 sure on low-class ethnic minorities, justifying this
by claiming that the ethnics have unstated
income from their handicrafts.

651 dition; with fertility of soil, size of plot, size of
harvest in a given year, constituting merely secondary
651 considerations. For the tribute is regarded as payment
427 also for the right to squat on the land, to gather dead-
wood and cowdung for fuel, wood and nature-grown fibers
for utensils, pasture cattle and donkeys, build a hut,
use the water in the brook. Consequently, a greedy
landlord parcels out his land in smallest possible plots,
to receive as much profit as possible, and he is aided
and abetted in this by the poor tenants who are so jeal-
ous of each other that they complain if their neighbor-
ing tenant has been granted more land than he can farm
without servants. The tribute for such a minimum plot
to the landlord thus takes the form of a "quitrent"
(now that the statute-labor has been abrogated official-
ly, though not always actually):

1 madiga of grain (usually tyeff), referred to
as "amsho"

plus 1/2 madiga of "qolo" (usually barley, for roasted
condiments or beer-making).

651 Only in export duties and import tariffs does the
439 central government have full control. Export taxes,
ranging usually from 28 - 50% on coffee, the major val-
uable export, are levied and collected by the Ministry
of Finance. This product comes from the southwest,
Jimma sub-province, or Harar, in the southeast, both
areas conquered by Menelik II from the Galla, and there-
fore under more unchallenged central administration.

THE NORTHERN PROVINCES: LAND TENURE

soldiers. He would also have, like the Emperor, official estates set aside for the upkeep of his large household and it would be these he would be most anxious to retain if he lost his governorship. For these estates he could call up the labour of soldiers and *gabars*.¹ Parkyns recorded in the mid-nineteenth century that for his estates the governor could exact one day's work for clearing, one for sowing, two for cleaning, and two for harvesting, and this was still the custom in this century.² Instead of cultivating his estates directly by using labour in this way, the governor might lease his land to tenants who would pay him a stated proportion of the crop as rent. According to one authority in the north, governors claimed that one tenth of all privately owned land should also be cultivated for him and he would himself choose the lands. Where, as in Tigré, the governorship tended to remain for a period in the same family this was not so grave an injury to the province, but if a governor from outside were sent in the people might not dare to demand back the lands from the local family and were obliged to set aside new lands for their new governor.³ Besides the governor's estates there would be others attached to the various offices of his assistants.

In addition to their more regular dues from the people it was customary for governors and their assistants to demand special gifts from time to time, such as a sheep from each village at Easter and at the festival of the true cross.

THE CHURCH AND THE ARMY

The Emperors were always extremely generous to the church, even if they had not gone so far as to allocate that third of the original legend which the famous cleric Takla Haimanot claimed in 1270. Every priest, monk, *debtera*, and deacon, in so far as he was excused from the work of the fields, required that land furnished with slaves or *gabars* should be set aside for his support. A vast total of land was burdened with this service. The piety of Emperors warred here with their political interests—at one moment they were moved to give, at another to resume their gifts. But it was not easy to assert the royal claim against monasteries which were undying corporations or against churches which needed permanent endowment and were, moreover, served by priests determined to pass on their lands with their offices to their sons. Moreover, the very character of the grants protected them. Their most

¹ Walker, *op. cit.*, pp. 189-91.

² Parkyns, M., *Life in Abyssinia*, 1853, vol. 2, p. 230. Also Walker, *op. cit.*, p. 191.

³ Rossini, pp. 107-8.

THE NORTHERN PROVINCES: LAND TENURE

and thirdly its derivation from the rights of some forefather who first took possession of the land. 423

Where the *resti* land was still held by a large kindred group, the individual family had a secondary or derived ownership of a piece of land adequate to meet its needs. When a son married and set up house he applied through his father to the council which allocated a plot to him within the kindred land. Thus the hereditary right was to land within that of the *enda*, not necessarily to a particular piece of land. Sons and, in certain conditions, daughters would inherit their father's rights. Before a man could give or sell his share of land he must offer it first to members of his *enda* and then to those of his village, and this restriction might apply to a subsequent sale of the land. It seems that in some parts the control of the *enda* council was even stricter and that the individual had no more than a very restricted usufruct, with frequent reallocation by lot. 423 428

The complexities of land tenure have only to be defined in these general terms to make it necessary to list numerous qualifications and apparent inconsistencies. These cannot all be given here. Mention must, however, be made of the system of village ownership, which, as a result largely of later immigration and of heavy pressure upon the land, had in some parts overlaid or ousted the *enda* ownership and the principle of *resti*. In these units (the development of which, though not begun by the Italian Government, was encouraged by it), the village council made an equal division of its lands, which were allocated by lot in three categories according to fertility, to all inhabitants of the village, whether *restenyas* or not. There was a redistribution at periods ranging from three to seven years. Village ownership appears to have been more just and flexible than that of the *enda*, though it is not clear how it dealt with improvements and permanent crops. 423

From the social aspect it is interesting to learn that everywhere, even where village ownership had deprived the *restenyas* of their special privileges with regard to land, their personal prestige remained. The *restenyas* were the people of superior status who, however small their holdings, could claim to belong to families which descended from the first family to hold the land. This gave them a peculiar status; it endowed them with a primacy in the local councils and even, in some parts, with certain small dues and privileges; it is from their ranks alone that the village chief, the *chiga-shum*, was chosen. 423 554

In addition to these main forms of ownership the *restenyas* could create subsidiary forms by leasing or lending their land or, especially in the case of large and absentee landlords, by introducing a number of tenants to farm their land and pay with their services, the landlord 427 ●

THE GOVERNMENT OF ETHIOPIA

- 427 paying the tribute for these *gabars*. (This method was also very common in Ethiopia proper.) There might also be forms of *métayer* contract. It need hardly be said that, after very long tenure, a tenant would try to claim that his land was *resti*, and that, with the growing shortage of land, numerous disputes resulted.

427 One of the main interests of Dr. Nadel's valuable analysis of Eritrean
177 land tenure is that it shows the Ethiopian system as it was after half a century of Italian rule and as it is now under a British administration. The Italians swept away the upper parts of the structure except in so far as they allowed favoured chiefs to hold their old large estates, but at a lower level the system has been little changed. British administrators—who, of course, must act with the restraint of temporary caretakers—found their main problems arising from the intense, indeed passionate, competition for the inadequate amount of land which leads to numerous and long-drawn-out disputes. The Eritreans are proud of their land law, but to the European observer the lack of finality in their disputes and the great difficulty of obtaining any implementation of the decisions either of arbitrators or of native courts are great obstacles to the proper development of the land. But the difficulties with regard to tenure are, in all probability, much wider than legal questions and arise from the strain which the changing use of land is putting upon all customary African tenures.

- 423 Another most interesting conclusion drawn by Dr. Nadel is that the stubborn pride and conservatism of the *restenyas*, who cling to all their privileges with a fierce tenacity, represent a social evil. He speaks of the narrow exclusiveness of the system and its rigid political and economic privileges. 'It excludes large sections of the population permanently from a share in the administration of their own communities and keeps them in a state of dependence and economic insecurity. . . . To-day we are facing not merely the economic system of *resti* but a *resti* mentality.'¹ If this is true of that part of Ethiopia where both migrations and Italian policy have weakened this system, it is likely that in northern Ethiopia the problem is presented in even more rigid and difficult terms. But this, again, is only one illustration of the widespread African problem of harmonizing the existing tenurial rights of the original land-holders with the interests of the population as a whole.

¹ *Ibid.*, no. 2, p. 108.

[pp. 293 ff. not processed]

56 / WAX & GOLD

121 other hand, has hitherto been impeded by two characteristics of humanistic
 * 565 and social studies. The historian's view has been limited by his reliance on
 written records that deal chiefly with the activities of men of power and the
 conceptions of literati. The ethnographer or traveler who tries to give the
 peasantry its due has usually concentrated on the more evident and accessible
 facts of custom—activities related to work, play, kinship, and ritual. The
 peasant's inner feelings and notions have perforce been neglected.²

In default of a widely disseminated sensibility to peasant realities, modern-
 izing Ethiopians have thus come to view the peasantry in terms of misleading
 stereotypes: either romantically, as an embodiment of virtue, awaiting only
 proper leadership to realize their suppressed aspirations for freedom, justice,
 and progress; or else as inhabitants of a dark hinterland, barbarous in custom
 and blind with superstition. In this chapter we shall attempt a more empirical
 (128) account of one part of the Ethiopian peasant's world—that of the Amhara—
 with particular emphasis on the beliefs and values of the peasant himself. Our
 (114) account is based on seven months of residence among the Amhara peasantry,
 (12) using the observational techniques of participant observation, discreet ques-
 tioning, analysis of folk expressions, and Thematic Apperception Tests
 (TAT).³

THE INSTITUTIONAL SETTING
 OF PEASANT LIFE

* 565
 592 The homestead is the basic ecological and social unit of the Amhara
 (342) peasantry. The average homestead consists of from one to six small round
 (343) structures, built of wattle (or stone, as in Manz) and capped with conical
 thatched roofs. A well-equipped homestead will have one building for eating
 and sleeping, one for animals, one for grain storage, one as a kitchen, and one
 for entertaining guests; though for many peasants all these functions are
 served by a single large building. The homestead is normally located on land
 worked by the peasant. While most peasants plow land whose use is theirs by
 (423) hereditary right (*riss*), some are tenants on estates owned by the king, lords,
 (427) monasteries, or older relatives.

The smallest homesteads consist simply of husband, wife, and unmarried
 children. Sometimes a young married son will remain within the family home
 and, much less frequently, a young married daughter. Occasionally an older
 relative will be sustained there, or a younger relative will be brought up
 there. One or more servants—slaves, until a generation ago—complete the
 (556) household. The wealthier the peasant, the more relatives and servants will be
 found in the homestead.

621 At times hamlets will be formed by the clustering of households of a number
 602 of married brothers or other kin. These tend to have a patriarchal cast; if the
 (592) father is no longer living, the oldest male relative usually assumes jurisdiction
 for the affairs of the hamlet. But the nucleated village, contrary to erroneous

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565	<i>bajirond</i>	guardian of royal property, treasurer (two)
554	<i>liqa maḳuās</i>	king's double and keeper of the king's mule
644	<i>āggāfāri*</i>	protocol officer, superintendent of banquets

The status of these dignitaries may have been particularly vulnerable, depending so closely as it did on the whims of the monarch. Nonetheless their proximity to the center of imperial power gave them unique advantages. They were in a position to receive many gifts for favors and influence, as well as to come by some part of the royal revenues and to attend the royal banquets. They were consulted, together with military commanders, provincial governors, and high ecclesiastics, on important matters of state. Lands granted to them for their services enabled them to support small retinues of their own, including, in some cases, military contingents. They were normally an important factor in promoting stability and continuity during the troubled moments that usually followed the death of an emperor.²⁶

565 The above classification of titles is meant only to provide a quick overview
554 of their variety; no such formal compartmentation existed in the Abyssinian perspective. All the titles converged into a single hierarchy.²⁷ What is more, titles were not strictly connected to offices or functions, so military titles were frequently given to court or civil functionaries. This was particularly true of

[644] the court of Menelik, where, for example, the Superintendent of Royal Tents bore the title *bālāmbārās* and the Chief Hand-washer that of *gerāzmāch*.²⁸

[635] For centuries before, moreover, provincial governors were often known by military rather than civil titles, and men holding civil titles were liable to be called to take part in military campaigns by the sovereign.

565 The sociological reality underlying this overlapping of titles among the nobility was the essentially unspecialized nature of their role. The ideal type of the *maḳuānnent* was at once governor, soldier, and courtier. In time of war he set forth at his own expense, with his own troops, to support the cause of the emperor, or perhaps simply to defend his own regional interests. In time of peace he might sojourn, if permitted, at the court of his king or overlord, eating and drinking with his peers, giving counsel to his liege when asked, engaged in intrigue and otherwise seeking to improve his station.

- [427] When not active in warfare or the affairs of court, the nobleman would repair to his lands to supervise the agricultural production and the collection [643] of rents from his tenants. The emperors rewarded nobles who served them [423] with grants of land. The higher chieftains in turn rewarded their own followers accordingly. These estates were usually held *in absentia*, the peasants [427]

* *Āggāfāri* is an important title in the courts of provincial lords but is not mentioned in the court list of Iyāsu I, nor in that of the *Ser'āta Mangest*.

161 / *The Old and New Elites*

who cultivated them being required to hand over a certain proportion of their produce every year.*

A man's "bigness," however, depended more on political authority than possession of land. It was often true in Abyssinia, as in feudal France, that the most powerful lords actually possessed relatively few estates. So long as they were not out of favor, the nobility typically were given appointments as provincial and regional governors in return for their loyalty and services.

The responsibilities of governors at all levels were diffuse. As with the emperor, combined in their persons were administrative, judicial, and ceremonial, as well as military, functions. They were obliged to collect the land tax and tithes of their subjects and transmit the proper amount to the king. They communicated imperial proclamations, announced by beating the *nagārit*, a large drum which symbolized the legitimacy of their authority. They had to judge cases of litigation that originated in their court or were appealed from lower levels. They were expected to keep disturbances caused by bandits in their area down to a reasonable minimum. They had to preside informally on the occasion of religious festivals and to provide large feasts for their followers, and occasionally for the beggars and indigents of the area.

The fact that political position was granted as a reward for military activity, like so many acres of land—or to the highest bidder, as Almeida complained²⁹—suggests that the benefits of office outweighed its obligations. Indeed, public authority in Ethiopia was frankly regarded as a private possession by all concerned. The incumbent might change, but the office remained—not so much a set of obligations to fulfill in behalf of the king, or the state, let alone in behalf of the subjects—but a set of opportunities for personal aggrandizement.

The opportunities, both psychic and economic, were impressive. One was expected to avail himself of all the obsequious gestures which serve to swell the ego of an Abyssinian ruler. If so inclined, the governor could indulge his sadism ad libitum; sword, lash, and rope were, besides the *nagārit* and seal, the official insignia of a provincial ruler. He could order the peasants in his area to labor for him—to plow his lands or build his houses—as well as command them to military service. He could exact tribute from them without relief, in addition to appropriating for his family and retainers part of the

* Each land unit worked by a given tenant farmer, or *gabbār*, would be divided according to that proportion, in order to equalize the differences resulting from variation in such factors as the size of land units or the quality of soil. The proportion paid to the landlord varied with the location of the land; thus, one-half might be exacted for ordinary *dēgā* (high) land, while in certain *qolā* (low) areas only a tenth might be required, owing to the difficulties of heat, jungle, and wild beasts.